PUBLIC CITIZEN NEWS

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# Public Citizen Makes "Good Trouble"

BY KATHERINE GARCIA AND CHRISTINE WOOD

When the late Congressman John Lewis urged Americans to get in "good trouble, necessary trouble," he was calling on ordinary people to rise up against injustice. On July 17, the fifth anniversary of Lewis's death, hundreds of thousands of people heeded that call by taking part in over 1,600 protests, rallies, and community events to resist the Trump administration and defend civil rights. Public Citizen – alongside countless national and local partners – was integral in bringing this year's "Good Trouble Lives On: John Lewis National Day of Action" to life.

Lewis first used the phrase "good trouble" on March 7, 1965, when he and hundreds of others marched across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Ala. "Speak up, speak out, get in the way. Get in good trouble, necessary trouble, and help redeem the soul of America," he urged. Days earlier, Lewis had been brutally attacked by police in a stunning display of violent racism that came to be known as "Bloody Sunday."

When Lewis died on July 17, 2020, the country was again reckoning with its long history of racism and police brutality. Two months prior, on May 25, 2020, a Minneapolis police officer had forced a Black man named George Floyd to the ground and

see **John Lewis**, page 4 ▶

ARLINGTON
COURTHOUSE
PLAZA
VOTE
Good
Trouble
Lives

Photo of a person participating in the fifth annual John Lewis National Day of Action in Arlington courtesy of Public Citizen.

# Not a Border Crisis, But a "Free Trade" Crisis

BY MEENA RAKASI

Alligator Alcatraz was not on anyone's bingo card for 2025, but President Trump continues to surprise with his administration's horrific capacity for violence towards immigrants. While Trump's actions are unparalleled in scope and lawlessness, they are driven by a legacy of U.S. interventionism in Latin America and exploitative trade policies. These policies have destabilized communities abroad, creating the very migration flows Trump now seeks to exploit for political gain.

A new report by Iza Camarillo from Public Citizen's Global Trade Watch and the National Project for New Americans (NPNA) unpacks how decades of corporate-led trade agreements have displaced millions of people, stripping them of their livelihoods and forcing them to migrate to survive. Once they arrive in the United States, many migrants are criminalized, funneled into low-wage jobs, or detained in for-profit prisons. Yet Trump continues to blame immigrants for working people's frustrations.

U.S. manufacturing workers have long decried free trade agreements that empty out factories and create ghost towns as companies relocate elsewhere. The flipside of the coin is that the countries to which these businesses relocate also get hollowed out. After the passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), artificially cheap imports and multinational corporations displaced Mexican small farmers and artisans. Lucky workers found jobs in maquiladoras – sweatshops bordering the U.S. – while the less fortunate, facing unemployment, sometimes migrated to survive.

Despite having seen the destruction wrought by NAFTA, the United States, at the behest of corporate interests with privileged access to negotiations, repeated the model with the Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA), which damaged the economies of the rest of Central

see **Trade**, page 4 ▶

# Revolving Door Trump 2.0 Officials Create Fossil Fuel Playground

BY ALAN ZIBEL

On the first day of his second term in office, President Donald Trump declared a "national energy emergency," falsely blaming the Biden administration's push for a transition to renewables for a supposed crisis in the reliability of energy.

Trump's order misleadingly claimed that "a precariously inadequate and intermittent energy supply, and an increasingly unre-

see **Fossil Fuel**, page 12 ▶

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## GET TO KNOW PUBLIC CITIZEN

# GABY ZWOLFER

### An ongoing series profiling Public Citizen leaders and staffers

The mastermind behind Public Citizen’s social media accounts, Gaby Zwolfer leads the effort to highlight the organization’s efforts and accomplishments across several platforms and engage younger generations in its work. Zwolfer, who joined the organization as its senior digital content manager in 2024, brings several years of political and digital content creation experience with her to Public Citizen as an alum of the Campaign Workshop, the Messina Group, and the U.S. Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee. She grew up in Illinois and Florida and holds a bachelor’s degree in political science and public relations from the University of Florida. A passionate traveler, she managed to visit a new place every month of 2024. One of her latest adventures was a four-day hike up to Machu Picchu in Peru.

**How did you become interested in politics and public advocacy as a career?**
**Zwolfer:** My interest began in high school, when I was a member of Model Congress, a club similar to Model UN. As part of the club, I wrote mock legislation that I succeeded in passing through a mock House and Senate that convened in Washington, D.C. This was my first direct exposure with the political process, albeit in a mock format. Career-wise, Angela Bradbery, a former communications director for Public Citizen, was a professor of mine in college, and it was through her that I learned how the political and communications fields can intersect.

**What value does social media have in furthering the mission of an organization like Public Citizen?**
**Zwolfer:** Social media is critical to everything happening now; it’s how the world communicates! A lot of people view social media the way they did 10 years ago: as a means to connect with friends. But now, it functions as so much more: our news, our media, our entertainment. Because of this, I believe it’s essential that nonprofits like Public Citizen prioritize social media to stay current with every generation, as this is our new norm.

**What’s something about working in the Senate you think many people wouldn’t know?**
**Zwolfer:** As obvious as this may sound, the thing I had the most difficulty adjusting to was simply seeing members of Congress in my day-to-day life. For instance, Sen. Bernie Sanders’ office was directly across from mine when I worked at the U.S. Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, so I saw him multiple times a week and always had the pinch-me thought, “Oh my gosh, he’s a real person!”

**Which dream celebrities or influencers would you want Public Citizen to partner with, and on what topics?**
**Zwolfer:** Mark Ruffalo would be an amazing person to partner with because he has been such a vocal activist in the environmental protection space. Elmo would be a great choice to talk about the rescission package and cuts to PBS. Jon Stewart could do a segment on the Trump regime’s attacks on our democratic norms.

**What do you enjoy about working in our communications department?**
**Zwolfer:** The Public Citizen communications department is the most fun and collaborative space I’ve ever gotten to work in. Everyone works so well together, has a great attitude, and is in it for the right reasons, which is refreshing.

**Kiss, marry, kill: X, TikTok, and Instagram.**
**Zwolfer:** Definitely kill X because it’s been corrupted by Elon Musk. Kiss TikTok because it’s a fun app, but I don’t know if I see it staying around long-term. And then marry Instagram because it’s been around forever, and I don’t think it’s going anywhere.

— Compiled by Claire Simon ■

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Public Citizen is a national nonprofit membership organization based in Washington, D.C. Since its founding by Ralph Nader in 1971, Public Citizen has fought for corporate and government accountability to guarantee the individual’s right to safe products, a healthy environment and workplace, fair trade, and clean and safe energy sources. Public Citizen is active in Congress, the courts and government agencies.

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## EDITORIAL

# Litigating for Democracy: Public Citizen's Fight Against Trump's Power Grab

We're about to hit eight months of the second Trump term, and here at Public Citizen, we are using every tool we have to fight back against the administration's intensifying authoritarianism. This includes filing lawsuits, organizing mass mobilizations, pushing the media to accurately cover the authoritarian slide, and standing firm as a bulwark of resistance, hand in hand with you, our supporters.

**CO-PRESIDENTS' VIEW**
**LISA GILBERT AND ROBERT WEISSMAN**

Litigation has been a critical tool in the fight during the second Trump era, and Public Citizen is punching above our weight. We have filed 18 lawsuits against the regime since Trump returned to power (see page 6).

We have leaned in on legal action because the Trump administration is unilaterally and unconstitutionally dismantling the federal government – our government – while also lawlessly attacking the values we all hold dear.

Within minutes of Trump taking office, Public Citizen and a partner group filed a lawsuit against his administration to push his so-called Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) to comply with the Federal Advisory Committee Act, which requires balance and transparency in federal committees. Since then, we've filed suits to try to protect Americans' privacy by stopping Trump's agencies from illegally sharing Americans' information with DOGE. We've also filed suits to reverse the unlawful deletion of critical health information from government websites. We filed a lawsuit to challenge the illegal funding freeze on foreign assistance. We filed a lawsuit against the IRS on behalf of immigrant rights organizations to prevent the unlawful sharing of tax data with immigration authorities. We filed a lawsuit challenging the termination of several programs in the Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences and another challenging the termination of programs at the National Institutes of Occupational Safety and Health.

And our efforts are paying off, with recent favorable rulings in two of our lawsuits against the administration.

In the first, a federal judge ordered the administration to restore a critical database that tracks the funding allocated to various agencies. That database went dark after Russell Vought – one of the primary architects of the infamous Project 2025 manifesto – took charge of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB).

While it isn't an agency many pay attention to, OMB is actually one of the most critical agencies in the government, as it oversees a vast amount of what the executive branch does. Vought believes that Trump has virtually limitless power – including the power to ignore Congress.

By law, OMB is required to publicly post information about the funds allocated to each federal agency (officially known as the Public Apportionments Database). However, in late March – under Vought's leadership and in clear violation of the law – OMB removed that database from its website. Public Citizen sued, representing Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW), challenging this removal. This July, the court ruled in our favor, saying "there is nothing unconstitutional about Congress requiring the executive branch to inform the public of how it is apportioning the public's money," and that the administration is "required to stop violating the law!" It ordered OMB to restore the Public Apportionments Database. This victory will benefit us all as the administration appears determined to conceal the way it is reallocating our money.

Our second recent win came when a federal judge ordered the administration not to close the 99 nationwide Job Corps centers. In 1964 – as part of President Lyndon B. Johnson's "War on Poverty" – Congress created the landmark Job Corps program to provide vocational and academic training to low-income young people. After Trump tried to close the centers nationwide, Public Citizen – with Southern Poverty Law Center as co-counsel – filed a class-action lawsuit in federal court challenging the Trump administration's unlawful action.

In July, the court put the decision to close the Job Corps centers on hold. While the decision is only a preliminary ruling, the judge wrote that the administration's actions were "unprecedented" and that it "unequivocally" acted "unlawfully" in its scheme to kill the storied Job Corps program.

We're really proud of our incredible litigation team (and our whole staff!) and the victories we are notching against the vindictive and lawless Trump administration. And even in cases and on issues where we haven't won, we are slowing down Trump and his enablers and making their pursuit of power harder. We are just getting started.

We want to end this column by saying that YOU inspire us. We believe in our core that what you and millions of your fellow Americans are doing makes a real difference. We promise to continue litigating, fighting, and working with you to make a difference in these turbulent times. ■

GARY JOB CORPS CENTER
A Model Learning Community
Gary Job Corps Community
STOP

Photo of a Job Corps Center in San Marcos, Texas, courtesy of Billy Hathorn / Wikimedia.

▶ **John Lewis**, from page 1

killed him  after kneeling on his neck. For weeks, in a powerful display of resistance, thousands of Americans across the country marched and rallied in protest of Floyd's murder – and the deaths of other Black people – at the hands of police.

For the past five years, voting rights groups and Black leaders, including the Transformative Justice Coalition, League of Women Voters, the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, and Black Voters Matter, have marked the anniversary of Lewis' death with a national day of action. Public Citizen's democracy team and the Declaration for American Democracy Coalition helped spearhead the effort since its early days, growing it from a few dozen events to thousands nationwide.

This year's action came on the heels of June's "No Kings" protests against the Trump administration – also organized by Public Citizen and partner organizations – which galvanized millions and helped expand "Good Trouble Lives On." Some media outlets mischaracterized the July events as "No Kings Day 2.0," but organizers worked to preserve the distinct history and purpose of the John Lewis Day of Action.

Public Citizen organizers, communications officers, and interns worked tirelessly to support event hosts nationwide, leading trainings, coordinating media outreach, and partnering with local groups.

The results were visible in creative acts of protest: a "Peace Train" caravan in Arizona collecting supplies for LGBTQ+ youth experiencing homelessness; a protest in Washington, D.C., that featured messages of resistance on umbrellas; a candlelight vigil in New Mexico for people who died in U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) custody; and countless marches, rallies, and block parties uniting neighbors in common cause.

"'Good Trouble Lives On' captured the community spirit and patriotism that Donald Trump and his sycophants have tried and failed to erode," said Public Citizen co-president Lisa Gilbert. "By coming together in peaceful protest, we move closer to John Lewis' vision of a beloved community – even in dark times."

As the Trump administration escalates attacks on civil rights, Public Citizen will continue organizing Americans to stand up, march in peace, and reclaim our democracy. National protests such as "Good Trouble Lives On" are not just symbolic – they are necessary acts of resistance. ■

STOP PROJECT 2025!
8647
8647
LIAR
NO OLIGARCHY!
RESIST
EQUALITY For All!
STANLEY MARTIN
VILLAGE AT MANASSAS PARK

Photo of people in Manassas Park, Va., participating in the fifth annual John Lewis National Day of Action in Arlington courtesy of Public Citizen.

▶ **Trade**, from page 1

America and displaced countless people.

Public Citizen's report, "Exporting Instability, Importing Exploitation," includes testimonials from immigrants who witnessed the cruelty of these systems firsthand, including an undocumented farm worker who, earlier this year, was injured on the job by an agricultural machine. He recalled: "If I went to a hospital or told anyone what happened, [the farm owner] would call ICE and deport my family." Even though he did not disclose his injury to anyone, the worker was fired without pay.

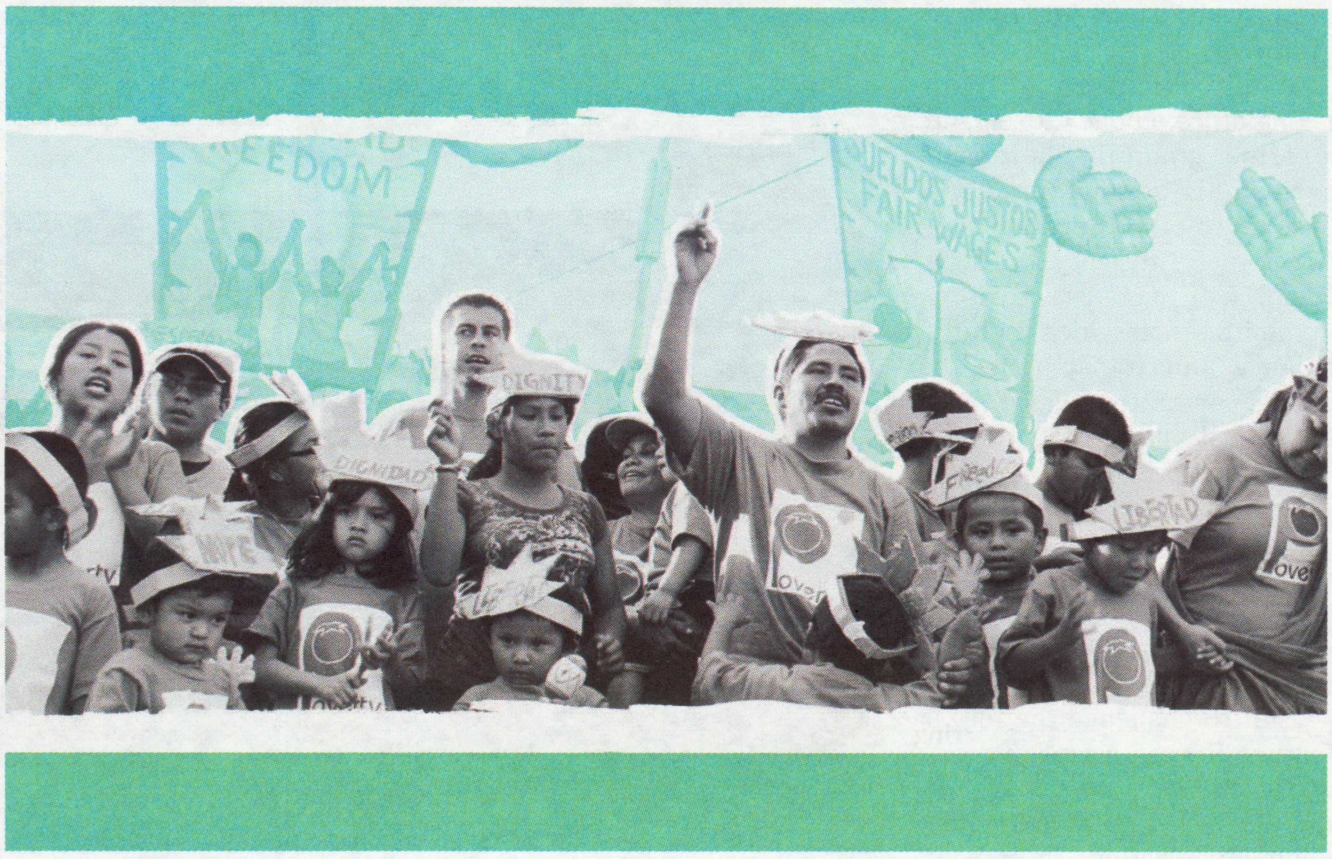
For some industries, anti-immigrant sentiment is lucrative for reasons beyond the exploitable workforce it creates. The report documents, for example, that many donors within the private prison industry who gave millions to the 2016 and 2024 Trump campaigns were rewarded with government contracts for migrant detainment facilities.

## Report Launch Event

The demonization of immigrants distracts from the real beneficiaries of current trade and migration policies: big corporations. They exploit both xenophobic fears and economic anxieties created by free trade agreements. "It is not immigrants who signed trade deals that devastated American communities…it was the billionaire class," remarked Rep. Greg Casar (D-Texas) at a launch event for the report.

At Public Citizen's report launch event, immigrant rights advocates

see **Trade**, page 5 ▶



Graphic courtesy of Mona Caron.

▶ **Trade**, from page 4

from the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights (CHIRLA) joined with the United Auto Workers (UAW) to underscore that mass migration is a foreseeable consequence of trade policies that prioritize corporate profits over human welfare.

"This expansive report illustrates that trade agreements like NAFTA and the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) were always rooted in extraction and corporate greed," said Christopher Zatratz, a legislative representative of the UAW. "The working class deserves a better way of life, regardless of where we come from."

Representatives Linda Sánchez (D-Calif.), ranking member of the Ways and Means Trade Subcommittee, and Casar, chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, spoke to the centrality of trade in any structural immigration reform. Sánchez summed up Trump's bait-and-switch approach to trade and immigration perfectly: "Trump has exacerbated economic pressures abroad while targeting immigrants to appeal to his MAGA base. The fact is that shutting down all legal pathways [to residency and citizenship], as this administration has done, doesn't manage our borders."

## What's Next?

Public Citizen and allies in and outside the United States are gearing up for an inflection point in the continent's trade and migration history: a mandatory and first-of-its-kind review of USMCA. The review, due in 2026, is an opportunity to demand fixes to Trump's USMCA, which has failed to reverse the race to the bottom that pits North American workers against each other.

Public Citizen has joined more than 600 labor and civil society organizations in a letter to the Trump administration about the reforms required to end the USMCA's harms to working people across borders.

With continued pressure from engaged citizens and devoted members of Congress, we have a unique opportunity to not only turn the tide of American trade policy but also highlight the true costs of migration and displacement caused by trade.

It's also a chance to hold Trump accountable for the lies he has fed the American people, both about our immigrant neighbors and his phony desire to upend the corporate-dominated global trade system. We will continue to fight against dehumanization and corporate greed to uplift the common dignity and rights of workers everywhere. ■

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# How Insurance Regulators Fuel Climate Change Profiteering

BY RICK MORRIS

Homeowners and renters across the U.S. are feeling the sting of skyrocketing insurance rates. On average, rates increased 20% over the last two years, and some states are projected to see double-digit increases next year.

Climate change is driving this insurance crisis, and insurance corporations are exploiting the crisis to line their pockets. The rate hikes have led to the insurance industry's most profitable year in history, with CEOs cashing in on record bonuses. This is profiteering, plain and simple.

To draw attention to this problem, Public Citizen gathered thousands of petition signatures and staged a protest at the National Association of Insurance Commissioners' August meeting in Minnesota. A group of citizen activists led by staff from Public Citizen's Climate Program demanded that the commissioners sign an anti-corruption pledge and publicly commit to preserving their independence from the industry.

"Regulators are supposed to stand for the public interest over corporate power. But as climate change alters the risk landscape, they're handing the pen to the insurance industry to write the rules to suit their bottom line. This isn't just regulatory capture — it's regulatory surrender," said Carly Fabian, senior policy advocate with Public Citizen's Climate Program.

Insurance companies are regulated by state commissioners, who set the rules for policies covering trillions of dollars. These rules affect the safety of Americans' homes, their finances, and even their health.

This new and pernicious form of climate profiteering is enabled by state insurance commissioners, who have called on Congress to abolish the small Federal Insurance Office in the Treasury Department. This move would stymie data collection in an industry that is in crisis due to climate change.

As revealed in previous Public Citizen reports, insurance companies are key backers of fossil fuel infrastructure. Coal mines, oil pipelines, and other fossil fuel projects depend on insurance to secure loans and investors. Insurance companies then take your premiums and invest them back into fossil fuel companies to the tune of $582 billion.

Americans need insurance commissioners to serve the public, not the industry. Public Citizen and its allies are building pressure on these insurance commissioners state by state. Together with partner organizations, we supported bills in New York and Connecticut where many of the nation's largest insurers are headquartered. We are also developing model legislation and regulatory guidance for state governments to tackle the climate and insurance crises.

***Visit the following url to email your state insurance commissioner and tell them to sign an anti-corruption pledge: tinyurl.com/commissioner-pledge*** ■

JUSTICE FOR
EXTREME
WEAT
SURVI
Pledge
Divest Now
No Campaign Cash
No Gifts, Meals, Trips
No Industry Jobs
CLOSE THE REVOLVING DOOR
PREMIUMS UP IN ALL 50 STATES
INSURERS INVEST EST. $582 BILLION IN FOSSIL FUELS
INSURANCE COMPANIES: TOP DONORS TO COMMISSIONER ELECTIONS
PREMIUMS EXCEED PAYOUTS IN >90% OF ZIP CODES
CLOSE THE REVOLVING DOOR!
1 IN 3 WEATHER RELATED CLAIMS GO UNPAID

Public Citizen activists outside of the National Association of Insurance Commissioners Summer National Meeting in Minneapolis, Minn., in August 2025. Photo courtesy of Rick Morris.

# Public Citizen Pushes Back Against Trump's Unlawful Actions

BY KARLA GILBRIDE

**TAKING TRUMP**
TO COURT

In the first eight months of 2025, lawyers from Public Citizen Litigation Group have been in federal court on dozens of occasions to argue on behalf of organizations and individuals suing President Trump and various federal agencies. These lawsuits address a wide range of issues. For example, Public Citizen is seeking to restore grant funding for foreign assistance, health research, and workers' rights programs around the globe. And we are representing three Commissioners of the Consumer Product Safety Commission, who were fired by President Trump in violation of a federal statute. This article will discuss three sets of cases in greater depth: those seeking to restore access to information, to keep government programs from being shut down, and to preserve the public's right to know what the government is doing.

## Restoring Access to Information

In February, Public Citizen Litigation Group filed suit on behalf of Doctors for America (DFA), an organization of more than 27,000 medical professionals from all 50 states, after the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) suddenly removed webpages and online datasets containing valuable health information. HHS had done so to comply with the president's executive order concerning "gender ideology." For example, HHS took down a webpage about HIV testing because the page included the phrase "pregnant people," and it took down a report entitled "Caring for Women with Opioid Use Disorder" because the report referred to gender.

A federal judge issued a preliminary order on Feb. 11 requiring some of the webpages to be temporarily restored, and on July 2, the same judge issued an opinion declaring the government's actions unlawful and requiring the webpages to be permanently restored. In that opinion, the judge noted that an executive order "does not absolve agencies of their obligations to follow the law."

In April, Public Citizen filed a similar lawsuit on behalf of the Sierra Club, the Union of Concerned Scientists, the Environmental Integrity Project, and California Communities Against Toxics. That lawsuit seeks the restoration of several interactive online tools that measure the impact of pollution and climate change on communities. These tools, which were previously published by federal agencies, have apparently been removed pursuant to federal policies that discourage references to diversity, equity, and inclusion as well as environmental justice. Removing the online tools makes it difficult for our clients to learn about pollution and climate change, to educate the public about those harms, and to engage with policymakers because alternative sources of information either do not exist, are less reliable, or are harder to access. This case is ongoing in the D.C. federal court.

"The federal government has developed many online resources that disseminate essential health, environmental, and other information," said Zachary Shelley, the lead Public Citizen attorney on both the DFA and Sierra Club cases. "When agencies develop these resources and encourage people to rely on them, they can't later cut off access without warning because they're afraid those resources might fail an ideological purity test."

## Protecting Government Programs

In numerous instances, the Trump administration has sought to shut down federal agencies established by statute for the benefit of the public. In several cases, we have brought suit to challenge those efforts - such as our cases concerning the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and the Institute of Education Sciences.

One such case concerns the Job Corps program, which was established during the Johnson administration to assist low-income youth with particular barriers to employment, such as homelessness, in developing job skills. Job Corps training occurs at one of 99 privately run training centers, whose operators contract with the Department of Labor. On May 29, the Labor Department announced that it would cancel all of these contracts and require all 99 Job Corps centers to shut down by June 30. Students were then told to leave the centers where they were living and to find alternative housing; their vocational training was abruptly halted.

Public Citizen, along with co-counsel at the Southern Poverty Law Center, filed suit on June 18 on behalf of seven Job Corps students, seeking to represent a nationwide class of students at all 99 affected centers. The students requested a preliminary injunction or stay of the Labor Department's action. On July 25, a federal judge granted the motion and issued a stay of the agency's action, finding that the department's directive to shut down the Job Corps centers was likely unlawful.

## Fighting For Government Transparency

To ensure that the government does not act in the shadows, Public Citizen has several lawsuits under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), seeking records regarding such topics as the dismantling of USAID and communications between various agencies and the so-called Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE).

In another case, we achieved a victory for government transparency when a federal court ordered the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to resume publishing information about the decisions it makes to apportion congressional appropriations—that is, how much money each agency may spend and any conditions placed on those funds. OMB is required by law to publish this information in an online database, along with explanatory footnotes. However, in March 2025, OMB declared that it would no longer do so and removed the database from its website. Representing Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW), Public Citizen Litigation Group filed suit seeking restoration of the database. The district court granted CREW's motion for summary judgment in July. Although the government has appealed, in the meantime, it has restored the database, giving the public access to this vital information about how their money is being spent.

Scientific truth and facts matter, no matter who is in power. Government programs designed to help people cannot be abolished arbitrarily and without due process, and the American people have a right to know what is being done in their name. These principles are core to our democratic system and to Public Citizen's mission. While the shape of the battles ahead will continue to evolve, Public Citizen Litigation Group remains committed to upholding these values in court. ■

DEVELOPMENT

One of the signs at the main entrance to the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) offices in Washington, D.C., being taped over on Feb. 7, 2025. Photo courtesy of G. Edward Johnson / Wikimedia Commons.

# Trump Puts Big Tech Above the Law

It made for a memorable tableau: at Donald Trump's second inauguration, some of the world's most powerful tech executives gathered among the dignitaries filling the U.S. Capitol. Amazon's Jeff Bezos, Meta's Mark Zuckerberg, Google's Sundar Pichai, Tesla's Elon Musk, Apple's Tim Cook, OpenAI's Sam Altman, and TikTok's Shou Zi Chew were all in attendance. Like figures in a painting, they lined up in dark suits and bright ties, the corporate titans of Silicon Valley framed as honored guests at the swearing-in of the next president.

A new Public Citizen report, "Deleting Tech Enforcement," shows that this moment was more than symbolic. The August report finds that Big Tech's lavish support for Trump's inauguration and campaign has already paid dividends in dropped federal investigations and weakened oversight. Donors who gave $1 million or more to Trump's inaugural fund include a who's who of Big Tech corporations.

Many of the tech leaders represented companies under active federal investigation. Now, with Trump back in office, the administration has gained the power to weaken, stall, or dismiss those cases outright. It has already dropped or halted a third of the tech-related federal enforcement actions inherited from the Biden administration.

## Enforcement in Retreat

As of January 2025, Public Citizen identified at least 104 technology corporations facing at least 142 federal investigations and enforcement actions. So far, 47 of those enforcement actions (against 45 tech corporations) have already been withdrawn or halted (38 withdrawn, nine halted).

Big Tech corporations benefiting from halted or withdrawn federal enforcement include eBay, Meta, PayPal, SpaceX, Tesla, and various cryptocurrency and financial technology firms.

"The dropped cases should not be understood as a mere shift in policy priorities that come with a change in administration," said Rick Claypool, a Public Citizen research director and author of the report. "They come amidst the tech corporations exerting an almost unfathomable amount of political influence."

Since the start of the 2024 election cycle, tech corporations facing federal scrutiny — and their executives and investors — spent a staggering $1.2 billion on political influence, including:

- $863 million in political spending, primarily to super PACs;
- $222 million in payments to Trump's businesses;
- $76 million in lobbying; and
- $25 million in donations to Trump's inauguration.

Big Tech companies that faced federal investigations and lawsuits during the Biden administration — including Amazon, Google, Meta, OpenAI, and corporations headed by Elon Musk (Tesla, SpaceX, xAI, The Boring Company, and Neuralink) — are now poised to exploit their ties with the Trump administration.

## Shielding Corporate Lawbreakers

On his first day back in office, Trump signed an executive order, "Ending Weaponization of the Federal Government," that directed Attorney General Pam Bondi — formerly a lobbyist for Amazon and Uber — to "review the activities of all departments and agencies exercising civil or criminal enforcement authority of the United States, including, but not limited to, the Department of Justice, the Securities and Exchange Commission, and the Federal Trade Commission" under the Biden administration.

Since then, the Trump White House has asserted new authority over traditionally independent enforcement agencies, including the Consumer Product Safety Commission, the Federal Trade Commission, and the Securities and Exchange Commission. This has allowed the administration to influence which enforcement actions proceed and which are stopped. Agency officials who resist White House orders face removal.

Public Citizen's Corporate Enforcement Tracker shows that more than 170 federal cases against alleged corporate lawbreakers have been halted or dropped. Technology corporations have disproportionately benefited from the administration's attacks on enforcement, with 47 dropped or halted cases to date.

## Musk and Other Billionaire Allies

Elon Musk's businesses faced the highest number of federal enforcement actions — at least 19 sets of allegations from nine federal agencies. Musk also led political spending, personally contributing $290 million to help elect Trump and another $50 million to pro-Trump super PACs.

Musk continued making large donations to Trump as recently as June, despite clashes on social media with Trump following the CEO's departure from his aggressively destructive "Department of Government Efficiency."

Other billionaire executives now deeply enmeshed with the Trump administration include venture capitalist-turned-tech-czar David Sacks, crypto and AI investor Marc Andreessen, and PayPal co-founder and Palantir chairman Peter Thiel.

"Although he pretends to be tough on Big Tech, Donald Trump is a willing enabler of Big Tech's wrongdoing," said Robert Weissman, co-president of Public Citizen. "For Big Tech, a relative pittance in political spending has generated gigantic returns in dropped prosecutions, policy U-turns, and aggressive administration support for Big Tech's global agenda."

Trump's White House has signaled that its next enforcement rollback will benefit Big Tech corporations pushing artificial intelligence into every corner of American life. The administration's AI Action Plan calls for reviewing all investigations that Trump's Federal Trade Commission inherited from Biden's FTC "to ensure that they do not advance theories of liability that unduly burden AI innovation." It also recommends a review of "all FTC final orders, consent decrees, and injunctions, and, where appropriate, seek to modify or set aside any that unduly burden AI innovation."

At risk are ongoing consumer protection investigations into OpenAI and Snap over harms caused by their generative AI systems, as well as antitrust cases against Microsoft involving AI. Several other firms — Amazon, Apple, Google, Meta, and X (formerly Twitter) — are also bound by FTC orders that could be weakened or overturned.

"The consequences of the retreat from enforcement against Big Tech are potentially disastrous," Claypool warned. "Few industries have reshaped American society as much as the technology sector has — sometimes beneficially, sometimes catastrophically. As a fresh wave of technology businesses seeks innovative ways to separate consumers from their income, their data, their attention, and their time, dismantling enforcement that protects the public will only turbocharge their recklessness." ■

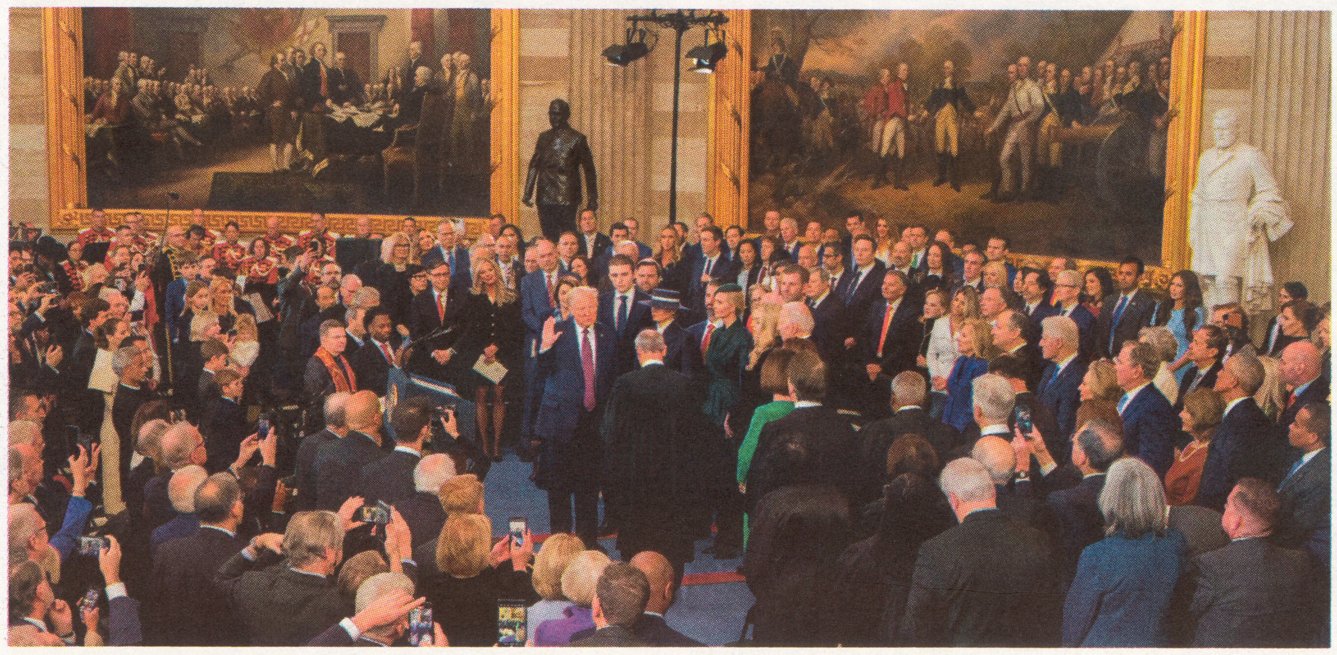

Photo of Donald Trump taking the oath of office in 2025 courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

# Trump Administration Aims to Shut Down Public Participation in Federal Rulemaking

**BY DAVID ROSEN**

The Trump administration is advancing a deregulatory strategy that strikes at the heart of democratic accountability: eliminating the public's right to weigh in on federal rules. That's according to a recent report from the Coalition for Sensible Safeguards, which is co-chaired by Public Citizen.

To advance its corrupt agenda, the Trump administration is arguing that agencies can ignore public participation requirements set forth by the Administrative Procedure Act (APA) when the president directs them to do so — a position that has no basis in law.

The APA requires agencies to notify the public about proposed rules, allow comments about the proposals, and respond to significant feedback from the public. The Trump administration is seeking to evade these requirements by directing agencies to broadly apply a narrow exception to the APA's notice and comment requirements.This approach effectively eliminates public input from both regulatory and deregulatory proposals.

"In Trump's first term, courts routinely overturned rules that did not follow the proper procedure," noted Sam Berger, consultant to the coalition and author of the report. "This is an unlawful and unprecedented push to cut the public out of the regulatory process."

"Notice and comment procedures empower both regulated industries and affected communities to share their perspectives and shape policy," said Rachel Weintraub, executive director of the Coalition for Sensible Safeguards, adding: "and Trump is just taking that away without justification."

Public Citizen has begun monitoring regulations in which the Trump administration is attempting to illegally bypass the notice-and-comment process. These include changes to rules for showerheads, implementing rules for federal executive boards, fair housing requirements, procedures for filling strategic petroleum reserves, antidiscrimination measures, eligibility requirements for disaster relief, and more.

Public input bolsters the legitimacy of the regulatory process. Meaningful participation in a regulatory process increases the likelihood that people will view that process as fair and legitimate. Public input also enhances the regulatory process itself by providing the agency with valuable information and perspectives from relevant stakeholders that can inform its decision-making regarding new regulations.

Given the brazen nature of the current efforts to undermine public participation, there will likely be numerous legal challenges to rulemakings that fail to undergo notice and comment. ■

# Baltimore County Passes Medicare for All Resolution

**BY CLAIRE SIMON**

America is uniting for Medicare for All. In early June, Baltimore County, Md., passed a resolution in favor of a Medicare for All national health insurance program, becoming the 135th municipality to do so.

Baltimore County's resolution, which was introduced by Councilmember Patrick Young and passed 4-3 in the county council, states that residents need support from the federal government to meet health care needs that are pushing them to use hospital services for non-emergent care. It is the eighth resolution to pass in a Maryland municipality.

"With Baltimore County now on the books, the top five largest counties in the state, including Baltimore City, are on record in supporting Medicare for All," said Brittany Shannahan, Public Citizen's Medicare for All organizer and a Maryland resident. "Together, these eight resolutions represent over two-thirds of the state's population. Maryland is recognized as a national leader in the usage of smart policy initiatives at the state level to reduce the uninsurance rate and inequities in health care more broadly. Yet gaps remain, and these resolutions represent a solid acknowledgment from our largest municipalities that broad intervention that harnesses the bargaining and administrative power of the federal government will be necessary in order to achieve a system that is both universal and affordable for state and local budgets."

"With the passage of Resolution 29-25, Baltimore County is joining a growing call to address the real gaps in our health care system," said Councilmember Young. "Far too many residents struggle to access the care they need because of high costs or lack of coverage. This resolution expresses our support for a more equitable approach, one that prioritizes public health and ensures all people, regardless of income or background, can get quality, affordable care."

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Public Citizen's former Medicare for All Campaign Director Melinda St. Louis and Medicare for All Organizer Brittany Shannahan show support for universal health care. Photo courtesy of Griet Van Acker

Baltimore County, which hosts a population of 800,000, is one of Maryland's purple counties and holds a large influence over the state's politics. It is represented by two members of Congress, though only one, Rep. Kweisi Mfume (MD-7), is a current Medicare for All Act co-sponsor. Activists hope the council's victory will push Rep. Johnny Olszewski (MD-2), as well as Senators Chris Van Hollen and Angela Alsobrooks, to support the bill.

The primary organizing group behind the resolution was the Baltimore County Young Democrats, and they were supported by other local groups, such as Progressive Maryland and SEIU 500. Shannahan also worked directly with the organizers to gather supportive comments from local residents. In November 2023, Baltimore's city council also passed a similar resolution.

"The fight for Medicare for All will be won by everyday Americans pushing for the health care system we need at every level of government," said Public Citizen Health Care Policy Advocate Eagan Kemp. "This new resolution passed in Baltimore County, Maryland highlights the basic sentiment that health care is a human right, that every person in the U.S. should get the care they need when they need it. We hope this resolution will move other cities and counties across the nation to demand Medicare for All." ■

# Political Games: Trump’s Rescissions Law Threatens Lives and Democracy

BY SARA FARAJ

The Trump administration is playing political games with human lives. A so-called “rescissions bill,” permitting the Trump administration not to spend previously appropriated money and passed in late July, cancels billions in funding for foreign aid, public broadcasting, and global health. Unlike previous rescissions, which targeted unspent and obsolete funds, the July 2025 law eliminates support for essential programs. This move not only puts vulnerable populations around the world at risk, but also undermines democratic processes and creates a dangerous legacy for governance.

Public Citizen led a broad coalition of civil society organizations in an effort to fight the rescissions. In June, Public Citizen led over 100 organizations in signing a letter urging members of Congress to vote no on the rescissions package. We highlighted the administration's illicit withholding of over $420 billion in congressionally approved funding and urged lawmakers to reject the bill ratifying approximately $9 billion in unspent funds.

In early July, Public Citizen hosted a town hall event that drew over 1,000 participants and raised awareness about the fight for public programs that people rely on all over the world. Speakers included advocates from Health GAP, Oxfam America, Refugees International, Free Press, and other advocacy groups. Massachusetts Representative Jim McGovern called to defend Congress’s power of the purse. Author John Green, a longtime advocate of access to medicines and global health, amplified the event on social media. Public Citizen Co-president Robert Weissman noted: “This package is an attack on democratic accountability and on the programs millions of people rely on to survive. No public program is safe if the executive can erase Congress’s decisions after the fact.”

Despite clear warnings that the bill would cut off lifesaving programs and undermine democratic accountability, the bill, officially known as the “Emergency Deficit Reduction Act,” cleared both chambers and was signed into law on July 24. The consequences extend far beyond funding cuts: this bill sets a dangerous precedent, allowing the executive branch to pressure Congress into reversing its own funding decisions, without the possibility of a Senate filibuster.

## Global Health on the Chopping Block

Rescissions will have a significant impact on global health systems. The President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), on which countless lives depend, was pulled from the rescissions package as a result of advocacy efforts, but it remains a target. Internal State Department documents obtained by *The New York Times* reveal that the administration may phase out the program within two years and replace PEPFAR’s country-led HIV responses with narrower programs and bilateral agreements that will serve the interests of U.S. pharmaceutical companies.

The rescissions that did pass and the administration's overall hostility to foreign aid are sabotaging lifesaving global health programs. U.S.-backed initiatives to prevent disease, protect children, and deliver humanitarian aid in crisis zones are being shuttered overnight. Funding for family planning, strengthening health systems, and pandemic preparedness has been eradicated. Clinics in Malawi, Yemen, and Haiti have lost critical supplies as funds dry up.

“People are dying — not by accident, but as a result of political decisions,” said Public Citizen’s Access to Medicines Director Peter Maybarduk. “Trump’s cuts will cost hundreds of thousands of people their lives.”

## Cuts That Increase Instability

The rescissions package eliminated billions of dollars in humanitarian aid, including $800 million in migration and refugee assistance, $496 million in international disaster assistance, and $460 million in assistance to Europe and Asia. For the first time since 1946, when the United States helped establish the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to feed children in the aftermath of World War II, the United States has discontinued all support for the organization, interrupting immunization campaigns in war zones like Sudan and Gaza, leaving thousands of children unprotected. These cuts will cripple crisis response, destabilize fragile regions, and leave vulnerable communities more exposed to exploitation by extremist or authoritarian forces.

## Undermining Knowledge and Accountability at Home

The law also eliminates funding for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, pulling more than $1 billion from NPR, PBS, and 1,500 local media stations. In many rural and underserved areas, public media is more than just a source of news — it’s a lifeline. In communities with limited broadband access, local stations are often the only source of real-time flood, wildfire, tornado, and snowstorm warnings. In some parts of the country, emergency radio, daily television news, and community announcements could be destroyed altogether, leaving Americans in the dark about urgent information around the world.

Photo of the U.S. Capitol courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

## A Precedent That Threatens Democracy

The rescission model threatens to undermine Congress’s constitutional power of the purse and concentrate authority in the executive. If a president can rescind funding that Congress has already enacted, no public program is truly safe.

The problem is especially severe because while spending bills are subject to Senate filibuster — effectively requiring some bipartisan agreement — rescission bills are not. The threat of rescissions will force Democrats to consider why they should agree to any appropriations bills, without new guarantees: Why should they negotiate a spending deal with Republicans if Trump and Republicans can unilaterally abrogate the deal months later?

Rescissions are a priority for the Trump administration, precisely because they concentrate power in the executive.

As the end of the fiscal year approaches, the Trump administration has submitted a new rescissions package targeting more foreign assistance funding, including for peacekeeping and to address the climate crisis. This package aims to be a “pocket rescission” and go into effect at the end of the fiscal year without any Congressional action whatsoever. It’s a move so aggressive even some Senate Republicans, like Susan Collins (R-Maine), are sounding the alarm.

Trump is dismantling programs authorized and funded by Congress. If lawmakers don’t intervene, they will be giving the president the green light to obstruct Congress’s core power of the purse and veto whatever he sees fit. That way lies the unraveling of democratic government. ■

# Public Citizen Returns $38 Million to Utility Customers in Illinois

BY PATRICK DAVIS

**WIN!**

In a win for electricity consumers in Illinois, Dynegy, an electric utility owned by Vistra, will reimburse $38 million to customers following Public Citizen's successful effort to hold the company accountable for driving up power prices in 2015 and 2016.

The settlement resolves a 2015 complaint made by Tyson Slocum, director of Public Citizen's Energy Program, to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) as well as related complaints by former Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan and Southwestern Electric Cooperative. Public Citizen alleged that Dynegy manipulated the Midcontinent Independent System Operator's (MISO) capacity auction – a process that helps determine the price consumers pay for electricity – in a way that inflated costs for Illinois customers.

"Dynegy orchestrated a scheme to dominate a segment of the energy market in Illinois," said Slocum. "It was a sophisticated set of maneuvers that enabled the energy company to reap unfair profits at consumers' expense. This case underscores how easily companies can exploit regional energy auctions."

In the 2015-16 capacity auction, FERC found that Dynegy manipulated prices by hoarding megawatts and making higher-priced offers, increasing costs for consumers.

FERC cited evidence that Dynegy, using its fleet of seven coal power plants to dominate the Illinois market, rigged bids, and forced energy prices higher for consumers.

The July settlement ends nearly a decade-long dispute between Public Citizen and Dynegy.

"These auctions directly affect how much consumers pay for their electricity," said Slocum. "Public Citizen is committed to ensuring that the public isn't harmed by the energy industry's behind-the-scenes maneuvers." ■

# Public Citizen Challenges Trump's Bailout of Fossil Fuel Power Plants

BY PATRICK DAVIS

In one of his first acts after returning to office, President Donald Trump declared a sweeping "energy emergency" that handed fossil fuel executives exactly what they wanted: a chance to keep outdated coal and gas plants running on the public's dime under the guise of an entirely fake emergency. Public Citizen is leading the fight to stop this costly and unlawful bailout.

In two emergency orders in May, the Trump administration issued unprecedented and likely illegal emergency orders to keep two expensive, polluting fossil fuel power plants operating beyond their scheduled retirement dates: Michigan's J.H. Campbell Generating Plant and Pennsylvania's Eddystone natural gas plant. As this issue of Public Citizen News was going to print, the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) issued another set of orders extending operations at both Campbell and Eddystone until November.

Public Citizen, Earthjustice, and other allied groups are challenging these orders before the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC).

"Trump's last-minute emergency orders in May – issued literally on the last days these power plants were set to operate – caused significant, expensive complications," said Tyson Slocum, director of Public Citizen's Energy Program. "Old units like Campbell and Eddystone require major maintenance, which have been deferred because of their planned retirement."

Under the emergency orders, consumers rather than the plant owners are forced to shoulder all of the costs to keep the units running. Campbell's owner, Consumers Energy, disclosed to the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) that it spent $29 million to operate the coal plant for just 38 days after Trump's emergency declaration. That entire cost will be passed on to ordinary American households and other utility customers in the form of higher electricity bills.

## Billions at Stake

According to an independent analysis by Grid Strategies LLC, if the U.S. Department of Energy forces large retiring fossil fuel plants to stay online through 2028, ratepayers could face more than $3.1 billion in extra costs each year. If older units are brought back into operation, those costs could rise to $6 billion annually.

"The Department of Energy's abuses are not some academic dispute," said Michael Lenoff, senior attorney at Earthjustice. "The agency obligates Americans to take money out of their pockets to pay for unneeded coal plants to pollute their air. That is unlawful, unwise, and unfair."

## A Manufactured "Emergency"

In June, Public Citizen argued to the Department of Energy that Congress restricted the president's use of energy emergencies to extraordinary circumstances, which have not been met.

"The U.S. Department of Energy has failed to demonstrate that an energy emergency currently exists," said Slocum. "Even the long-term concern that the department alleges exists has no credible projection to back it up. This is all an imaginary effort to keep fossil fuel producers in business."

"It may seem absurd that, at a time when no country in the history of the world produces more oil and natural gas every day than the United States, there would be an energy emergency," added Slocum. "But radical, unhinged fossil fuel executives now have the ear of the president. They see this phony emergency declaration as an opportunity to undermine progress in wind and solar development and to maximize fossil fuel exports. These exports increasingly dictate whether their fracking operations are profitable or not." ■

Photo of the J.H. Campbell plant from Consumers Energy / Flickr.

# Trump and Allies Threaten to Worsen Health Care, Putting Lives at Risk

> **"Trump has nominated unqualified and dangerous people for the most critical health positions in the country."**
>
> **— Eagan Kemp, Public Citizen health care policy advocate**

Barely eight months into his second term, president Donald Trump has disrupted, depleted, and desecrated our nation's already fragile health care system, putting millions of lives in jeopardy. A new Public Citizen report, "The Rise of Trump's Dangerous Health Cabal," highlights the threats posed by Trump's health care appointees – not just to the agencies they're supposed to run, but also to patients, providers, and the programs they rely on.

"Trump has nominated unqualified and dangerous people for the most critical health positions in the country," said Public Citizen Health Care Policy Advocate Eagan Kemp and author of the report. "From slashing Medicaid and the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and laying off staff to failing to respond to emergencies like the ongoing measles outbreak, America is reaping the bitter fruit of Trump's terrible cabal. The administration is actively worsening existing gaps in our health care system."

The report highlights the threat posed by Trump's health officials, including:

- Robert F. Kennedy Jr., appointed by Trump as Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS), has promoted assorted conspiracy theories, such as claims that exposure to environmental chemicals can cause children to become gay or transgender. He is also known for holding anti-vaccine and anti-science views, and now imposing them as official government policy.
- Mehmet Oz, appointed as Administrator of the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, has expressed dangerous views on the privatization of Medicare and faces conflicts of interest, including significant investments in Medicare Advantage insurers and actions that undermine the programs he oversees.
- Jim O'Neill, appointed as Deputy Secretary of HHS and serving as interim head of the Centers for Disease Prevention and Control after Kennedy forced out the Senate-confirmed director of the agency, holds fringe views and has significant ties to for-profit biomedical companies.
- Casey Means, selected by Trump to serve as Surgeon General of the United States, faces criticism for her lack of qualifications and her misinformed, conspiratorial views on public health issues.

The report also describes the chaos Trump and his allies unleashed in the early months of his second term, plunging an already fragmented and dysfunctional health care system into a deeper crisis. For instance:

- Trump fired several inspectors general who were ensuring that agencies are accountable to the American people.
- The administration initiated mass firings in health care agencies, including entire offices, leading to research delays; with some workers later receiving offers of reinstatement.
- The administration removed thousands of web pages that doctors and other health professionals rely on for important information.
- HHS has failed to take crucial steps to contain a dangerous measles outbreak, and Kennedy has spread misinformation about measles vaccines and possible treatments.
- The Trump administration ordered the National Institutes of Health to conduct politically motivated "research" on the extent to which transgender people "detransition" or experience regret after transitioning.
- RFK ended yearly COVID-19 booster recommendations for healthy children and pregnant people.
- RFK's HHS released a report that included a number of AI-hallucinated research articles.
- RFK fired and replaced all members of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) – a key committee that advises on which vaccines Americans should get – with a number of unqualified people.
- At the behest of Trump, Congressional Republicans passed a massive tax cut for billionaires, paid for in part by huge cuts to Medicaid, the Affordable Care Act, and other crucial programs. These cuts threaten to cut off access to health care for millions of Americans.
- The Trump administration has ramped up efforts to privatize Medicare by hiking rates for Medicare Advantage plans.

The list has only grown longer in the few weeks since publication of the report.

The actions of Trump, Kennedy, and their allies underscore the need for vigilance and a swift response. While the health care system has flaws, their reckless policies are worsening matters, fast. Members of Congress must call for immediate hearings on Trump's health care nominees and hold them accountable and we all must intensify our efforts to protect health care in America. The stakes could not be higher. ■

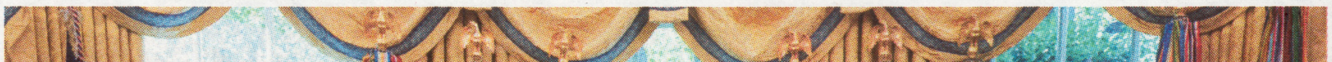

**Photo of President Donald Trump with HHS Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. (left) and Administrator of the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services Dr. Mehmet Oz (second from right) courtesy of the White House / Wikimedia.**

▶ **Fossil Fuel**, from page 1

liable grid, require swift and decisive action.” This dramatic – and inaccurate – proclamation was more than just Trump’s typical political theater; it laid the groundwork for a sweeping attack on federal agencies and states to serve fossil fuel interests.

**“We must do everything we can to fight back as Trump systematically dismantles environmental protections, hires advisers who dispute mainstream climate science, and enacts a dangerous energy agenda at the expense of public health, the planet, and a sustainable future.”**

**— Public Citizen Co-president Robert Weissman**

A new report from Public Citizen and the Revolving Door Project, "Trump's Polluter Playground" unmasks how the second Trump administration is enacting an “all of the dirty” energy strategy, favoring oil, methane gas, and coal, while simultaneously trying to undermine renewable energy.

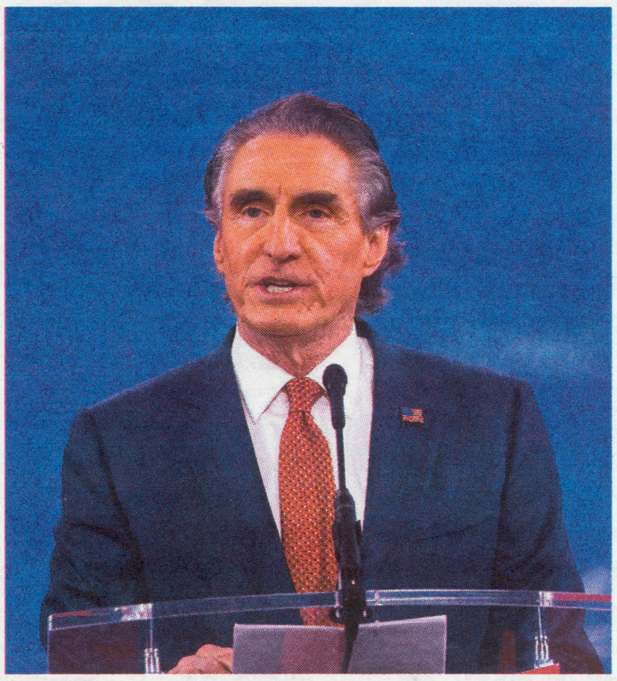

Photo of Doug Burgum courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

“Trump’s radical executive order declaring a bogus emergency has set in motion the dismantling of generations of public health and safety laws to promote coal, gas and oil,” said Tyson Slocum, director of Public Citizen’s energy program. “This polluter playbook entails a brazen attack on the leadership and clean energy priorities of Americans living in the most populous regions of our nation, forcing America’s working families to pay more for energy.”

Public Citizen and the Revolving Door Project found more than 100 examples of how President Trump has stacked key federal agencies with individuals deeply entrenched in the fossil fuel sector and right-wing ideologues determined to roll back environmental protections and prioritize dirty energy. These appointments and nominations include:

- 42 former fossil fuel industry employees;
- 27 former corporate executives;
- 14 individuals tied to fossil fuel-funded right-wing think tanks;
- 13 former corporate lawyers;
- 7 individuals with strong ties to Republican politics; and
- 6 people connected to utility or nuclear energy companies.

According to the analysis, fossil fuel-connected officials are concentrated within the Department of the Interior, the Department of Energy, and the Environmental Protection Agency, the Justice Department, the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Transportation, and the Department of Commerce. It also found that more than two thirds of the administration’s 37 Senate-confirmable nominees to the Energy and Interior Departments and EPA have direct ties to fossil fuel interests.

Numerous Trump appointees are linked to the Texas Public Policy Foundation and the America First Policy Institute. Both organizations are funded by Tim Dunn, the evangelical billionaire who sold his oil and gas company to Occidental Petroleum in 2023 and has been working to push Texas and national politics to the far right.

Instead of embracing the typical “all of the above” energy strategy popular with Washington lobbyists that promotes planet-destroying fossil fuels as well as renewables, Trump only wants dirty fuel. His administration is aggressively pushing coal – the dirtiest fuel – even providing handouts to coal exporters.

Richard Goldberg, a White House staffer on the new National Energy Dominance Council, openly announced the administration's goal in August: to swiftly approve fossil fuel projects by removing regulatory hurdles.

## Key Figures Creating Trump’s Polluter Playground

- **Doug Burgum (Interior Secretary)**: A close conduit between oil and gas donors and the Trump campaign, the former North Dakota governor chairs the National Energy Dominance Council, promotes coal production, and has reversed his prior stance on renewable energy, using his agency’s powers to derail wind and solar. "Coal is incredibly important to our economy at a very fundamental level," Burgum said in April.
- **Chris Wright (Energy Secretary)**: The former CEO of a fracking firm, he has pivoted the Department of Energy to cheerlead fossil fuels and deemphasize renewables. Wright redirected a federal loan program to support coal, and issued orders preventing coal and gas-fired power plants from shutting down. Wright has downplayed climate change, writing that “[w]e will treat climate change as what it is: not an existential crisis but a real, physical phenomenon that is a byproduct of progress.”
- **Lee Zeldin (Environmental Protection Agency Administrator)**: A former Republican congressman, Zeldin has launched a comprehensive attack on the EPA, laying off thousands of workers, eliminating the scientific research office, and proposing the repeal of the crucial endangerment finding, which undergirds the EPA’s prior efforts to combat climate change.
- **Brooke Rollins (Agriculture Secretary)**: An alumna of conservative think tanks funded by Texas oil billionaire Tim Dunn, she has no agricultural policy track record to speak of. Under Rollins, agency staff has focused on scrubbing mentions of the climate crisis from the USDA website, expanding timber production, and attempting to repeal forest protections.
- **Sean Duffy (Transportation Secretary)**: A former reality TV star and Fox News personality, he has used his position to obstruct the wind energy industry, promote fossil fuels, disparage electric vehicles, and spread misinformation about public transit.

Beyond fast-tracking dirty energy, the Trump administration is attempting to undermine climate science. In late July, the Energy Department published a paper authored by notorious climate skeptics that downplayed the climate crisis and dismissed "exaggerated projections of future warming."

“In his second term, Trump and his cronies have come in prepared to do maximum damage,” said Public Citizen Co-President Robert Weissman. “We must do everything we can to fight back as Trump systematically dismantles environmental protections, hires advisers who dispute mainstream climate science, and enacts a dangerous energy agenda at the expense of public health, the planet, and a sustainable future.” ■

Mr. Chris Wright

Photo of Chris Wright courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

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# IN THE SPOTLIGHT

The following are highlights from our recent media coverage.

### Robert Weissman, co-president of Public Citizen

**On Trump profiting off the presidency:** *The New Yorker.* **On Trump's trip to Scotland:** *CNN Business.* **On the disastrous effect of the Big Beautiful Bill:** *Grist, Common Dreams.* **On Trump's AI Action Plan:** *The American Prospect.* **On Trump federalizing control of the Washington, D.C., police:** *Newsweek.* **On Trump's perfume scam:** *The Daily Beast.* **On Trump's Texas gerrymander:** *Black Star News.* **On Trump firing the Bureau of Labor Statistics Commissioner:** *Roll Call, The Center Square.* **On Mattel's use of AI:** *The Street.* **On the push from 1,000 nonprofits to protest loosening the Johnson Amendment:** *Baptist News Global.*

### Lisa Gilbert, co-president of Public Citizen

**On Trump's attempt to dismantle watchdog groups:** *The New York Times.* **On the Good Trouble Lives On day of action:** *Associated Press, Al Jazeera, Capital B Atlanta, Alabama Public Radio, Black Enterprise, Morningstar.* **On Trump federalizing control of the Washington, D.C., police:** *Associated Press, Newsweek, The Hill, The Independent.* **On Pfizer benefiting from Pam Bondi's changes to the U.S. Department of Justice:** *Miami Herald.* **On the push from 1,000 nonprofits to protest loosening the Johnson Amendment:** *Bloomberg Law, Common Dreams.* **On Emil Bove's confirmation to be a federal judge:** *Minnesota Reformer, Louisiana Illuminator.* **On the disastrous effect of the Big Beautiful Bill:** *Common Dreams.*

### Public Citizen Litigation Group

**On cuts to Job Corps:** *Bloomberg Law.* **On Trump being barred from removing health agencies' webpages after Public Citizen's lawsuit:** *Bloomberg Law, East Bay Times.* **On Trump requesting the Supreme Court to halt public regulator rehiring:** *Bloomberg Law, Bloomberg Government, Law&Crime, NBC.* **On Trump's AI plan:** *The Verge.* **On the IRS sharing taxpayer data with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement:** *ProPublica, Politico, The Hill, Independent, WSFA 12, Alabama Political Report, Fox 5 Atlanta, Common Dreams.* **On Trump's Day One order pulling billions of dollars worth of foreign aid:** *The Independent, Newsweek, The Hill.* **On a judge's ruling with Public Citizen that Trump must restore missing health webpages and data:** *Medstar.* **On a proposed Staten Island gas pipeline:** *SILive.com.* **On automotive broker liability in accidents:** *Freight Waves.* **On attacks on the U.S. Consumer Financial Protection Bureau:** *Common Dreams.*

### Tyson Slocum, director of Public Citizen's Energy Program

**On the harmful economic effects of natural gas:** *Forbes.* **On Trump's AI and energy plan:** *The Guardian.* **On utilities seeking to build power plants in states where that's otherwise not allowed:** *Inside Climate News.* **On Trump's mineral megadeal bypassing U.S. laws:** *E&E News.* **On coal and the anatomy of Trump's energy emergency:** *Politico.* **On Trump's Federal Energy Regulatory Committee takeover:** *Politico Morning Energy.* **On California's use of fossil fuels:** *Cal Matters.* **On the environmental toll of building data centers:** *KPLC.* **On higher electric bills for working families:** *WTOC-SAV.*

### Dr. Robert Steinbrook, director of Public Citizen's Health Research Group

**On the Food and Drug Administration's Drug Chief pick:** *Bloomberg Government.* **On huge cuts to mRNA research:** *The Hill.*

### Craig Holman, government affairs lobbyist with Public Citizen's Congress Watch division

**On being an advocate for good government:** *The Washingtonian, Politico.* **On Eric and Don Jr.'s trip to the Middle East:** *The Independent.* **On Rep. Maxwell Frost (D-Fla.)'s bill to end unlawful detention:** *West Orlando News.* **On interest groups footing the bill for congressional travel:** *Indiana Capital Chronicle.*

### Melinda St. Louis, director of Public Citizen's Global Trade Watch

**On Trump's tariffs:** *The American Prospect, Inside U.S. Trade.* **On Trump's shaky economy:** *RawStory.* **On Brazilian resistance to Trump's economic attacks:** *Common Dreams.*

### J.B. Branch, Big Tech accountability advocate

**On Trump's AI plan:** *Associated Press, The Guardian, The Hill, Ars Technica, Washington Times, AI in Healthcare.* **On Grok's antisemitic outburst:** *The Intercept.* **On 23andMe's bankruptcy:** *Lawfare.* **On Click to Cancel legislation:** *Consumer Affairs.*

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# Pay-to-Play in Texas: Abbott’s Donors Reaped Nearly $1 Billion in No-Bid Contracts

**BY JOSÉ MEDINA**

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott has a vast donor network that includes some of the wealthiest, most powerful Texans. Research by Public Citizen’s Texas office found that several of them have received nearly $1 billion in taxpayer-funded state contracts.

A recent report from the group, “Awarding Influence: No-Bid Contracts and Big Paydays for Abbott's Donors,” reveals how major donors benefited from no-bid government contracts, raising questions about the effectiveness of Texas’ ethics guardrails and the use of emergency powers.

“We identified a pattern,” said Cassidy Levin, a research fellow with Public Citizen. “Wealthy individuals donate to Abbott’s PAC, Texans for Greg Abbott. Then, after the donations, companies linked to those donors receive no-bid contracts. Donations usually come first, followed by contract awards.”

In total, the report identified $950 million in state contracts awarded to eight companies tied to Abbott supporters who collectively donated about $3 million from 2014 – the year Abbott first ran for governor – to 2024.

Adrian Shelley, Public Citizen’s Texas director, asserted: “Rules that let major donors win almost $1 billion in contracts breed public cynicism about government. Texas needs stronger ethics rules and stricter enforcement that prevent obvious conflicts of interest.”

Since Texas allows unlimited contributions from individuals, wealthy donors face no caps on their donations. They might see donations as investments that could be offset by taxpayer-funded contracts.

The no-bid contracts described in the report were issued after emergency declarations, including COVID-19 and Hurricane Beryl in 2024. Once the governor has declared an emergency, contracts can be non-competitive and bypass the normal bidding process that ensures the agreements are in the taxpayers’ best interest.

The biggest beneficiary of the contracts tracked by Public Citizen is the emergency management firm Gothams LLC, which received 48 non-competitive emergency contracts totalling $748 million from 2020 to 2024. Most of the contracts were awarded under Abbott’s COVID-19 emergency declaration. In 2022, the number of contracts awarded to Gothams slowed and the firm received only one, worth $43 million. That same year, the company’s founder, Matthew Michelsen, began contributing large sums of money to Texans for Greg Abbott, making five donations of $50,000 each between August and October 2022.

Over the following two years, he contributed an additional $350,000, bringing the total to $600,000. After these additional donations, contracts to Gothams again began to flow at a faster pace. Between 2023 and 2024, Gothams received 10 more contracts worth a total of $66 million. The company also received contracts under emergencies for Hurricane Beryl and border security.

Other firms with ties to Abbott’s donors include Deloitte LLP, which received four non-competitive contracts totaling $89 million, and Abbott Laboratories, which was awarded 10 non-competitive contracts totaling $63 million. Abbott is unaffiliated with Abbott Laboratories.

Public Citizen calls for urgent legislative action to restrict pay-to-play in Texas government contracting, require transparent reporting after emergencies, and enforce real penalties for violations. These changes are needed to restore trust in government contracting and ensure accountability.

Moreover, ethics laws should prevent conflict as well as any appearance of conflict in government decisions. Many states restrict donations from contracting companies or their principals. As detailed in an earlier Public Citizen report, 15 states have such restrictions in place. In Kentucky, for example, neither an elected official nor their appointees may award a non-competitive contract to an entity whose officers, employees, and their immediate family have made political contributions of more than $5,000 to that elected official in the previous election cycle.

“Trust in the Texas government is low,” noted Shelley. “Disaster recovery can’t be just another opportunity for corruption. Let’s pass laws to ensure that we put emergency response first and leave political influence out of disaster recovery.” ■

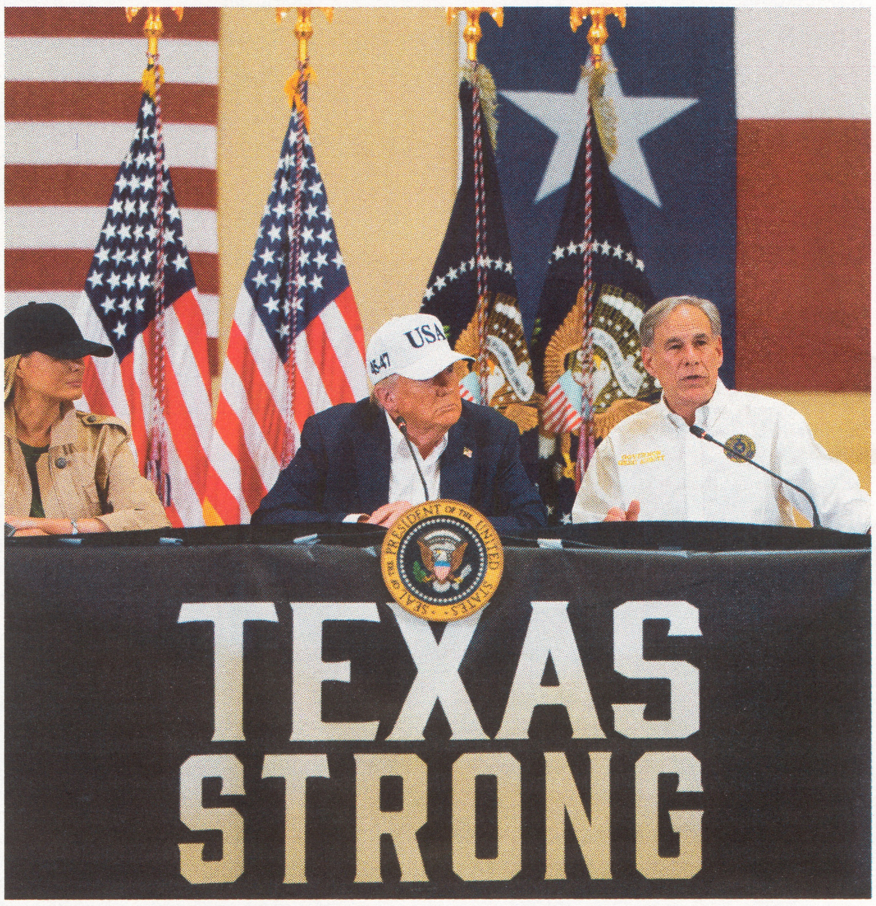

Photo of Greg Abbott (right) with President Donald Trump and First Lady Melania Trump in Kerrville, Texas, courtesy of The White House / Flickr.

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| 70 | 6.3% | $630 | 5.5% | $550 |
| 75 | 7.0% | $700 | 6.2% | $620 |
| 80 | 8.1% | $810 | 6.9% | $690 |
| 85 | 9.1% | $910 | 8.1% | $810 |
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